

A Wallet, A Dollar, and the Existence of God



**Making a Case for the Reasonable Nature of Christian Theism
in Short Three Steps**

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Introduction: Stepping Toward God

“Sometimes I am asked why I am a Christian. People often want a simple answer to this question, although I’m not sure the answer is really all that simple. But when push comes to shove, I can tell you that I am a Christian not because I was raised as a Christian, not because it works for me, and not because I had some deep need that Christianity met. I am a Christian because it is TRUE. Christianity is reasonable; it makes sense. It explains what I see in my own nature and in the world around me. That’s all there is to it. Let me share something with you that I hope will at least make it possible for you to see the reasonable nature Christian Theism...”



Part One: What Reason is There to Believe God Exists?

“Let me pull out my wallet and tell you why I believe what I believe. Let me open the money section. See this dollar bill? It’s alone in my wallet. Now let me ask you a simple question: ‘How did the dollar bill get in the wallet?’ I realize that this sounds like a ridiculously simple question, but let me make it a little more interesting. I want you to answer that question without going OUTSIDE the wallet for an answer.”

“Now before you contemplate a response here, let’s take a better look at the dollar. Clearly, the dollar bill is an amazing object. It contains so much detail! Specific numbers and drawings and words are inked on the paper. The dollar contains MORE than simple markings and symbols; these markings and symbols convey INFORMATION. And information is evidence that INTELLIGENCE is involved in the creation of the dollar. Information requires an intelligent mind to place the markings and symbols in a meaningful way, then an intelligent mind to interpret and understand what is meant by these markings. So, the dollar is clearly the product of intelligence. You and I would hardly disagree on this simple issue. We know that the dollar has been designed by humans.”

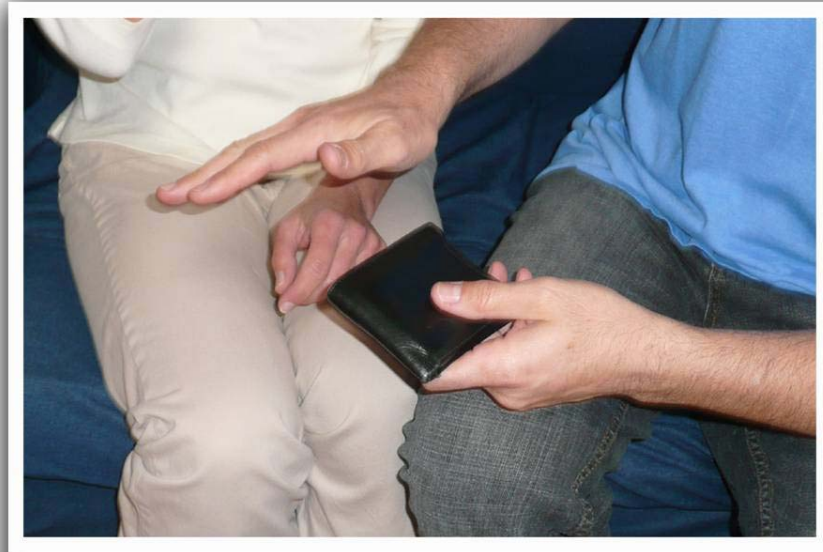


“So now, let’s talk about how the dollar got in my wallet. What are the possibilities? I know you are inclined to say the obvious: ‘Someone put that dollar in there!’ but that answer is not allowed; remember that I said that you have to answer the question without going outside the wallet for the answer, and you and I are on the outside. Yes, you could reasonably and logically presume that I (or someone else) put the dollar in the wallet, and yes I know that is without a doubt the very best and most reasonable conclusion. But our rules here simply won’t allow this answer. You’re going to have to stay INSIDE the wallet for the answer; whatever process you decide was involved in the appearance of this dollar, it must come from inside the wallet.”

“OK, so what are the possibilities that are left to us? How could the dollar get in the wallet if it wasn’t placed in there by someone or something OUTSIDE the wallet? Well, if you really think about it, there are only two options left to us. First, it might simply be that the dollar was ALWAYS in the wallet. It’s as old as the wallet and it has always been in the wallet. The other possibility is that the dollar formed over time from much more primitive materials that were in the wallet to begin with. Two options: the dollar is as old as the wallet, or the dollar has somehow evolved from other materials that have always been in the wallet. But let’s face it, neither of these answers really makes any sense. You and I know that wallets don’t come from the store with money in them, and we also know that small pieces of paper and ink didn’t just happen to come together with all the detail and complexity of the dollar.”



“OK, so what does all this have to do with the existence of God? With this simple illustration we are describing the problem that atheists, philosophical naturalists and materialists have when they try to explain how life began in the universe. How does matter come from non-matter? How does life come from non-life? How does INFORMATION appear in the DNA code if there is no INTELLIGENCE behind the code? It’s just like trying to explain how the dollar got in the wallet! If we limit ourselves to only natural, physical materialistic explanations, we simply cannot go outside the natural, physical materialistic realm for an answer. In essence, we cannot go outside the wallet. And if we force ourselves to stay inside the natural realm, we have to conclude that the matter and life we see in this universe has either always been here, or it has evolved over time from lesser base elements. It’s just like the dollar. If we have to stay inside the wallet for an answer, there are only a couple of possibilities”



“But the possibilities we’ve talked about are pretty lame, aren’t they? They don’t really satisfy us. Science has given us a ton of evidence to show that matter and the universe itself have NOT always been here! We now know that the universe had a beginning. Science has come to call this beginning the ‘Big Bang’.

Starting with Einstein and continuing to today, science tells us that all space, time and matter had a beginning. We know that matter in the universe is NOT infinitely old, and life in the universe appears even more recently. Our first answer, (that matter and life are as old as the universe) simply doesn’t explain how the universe ITSELF got here! If the universe had a beginning, then it makes sense that the universe had a beginner, and this beginner simply MUST have come from someplace other than the universe it began!”

“And if life evolved from other base materials, how did these base materials come to exist in the first place? How did something come from nothing, even if this something is very basic and primitive in nature? How did matter (regardless of how ‘basic’ this matter may be) suddenly appear within the natural realm?

Can any satisfactory explanation be offered?”

“Clearly the most satisfying answer for how a highly designed object appears within the wallet is to conclude that someone or something PLACED that object in the wallet. It’s crazy to limit our answers to sources that are INSIDE the wallet. When we do that we get a biased answer! The most UNBIASED approach would be for us to at least allow ourselves the POSSIBILITY that the answer may be OUTSIDE the wallet. In a similar way, it seems to me that the most unbiased science would also respect the possibility that the supernatural realm (OUTSIDE the natural order) might be a source for all the matter and life we see in the universe.”

“I believe that THEISM is true because the existence of an all-powerful first cause OUTSIDE the natural realm is the best and most reasonable inference from the evidence.”

Step Two: What Kind of God Exists?

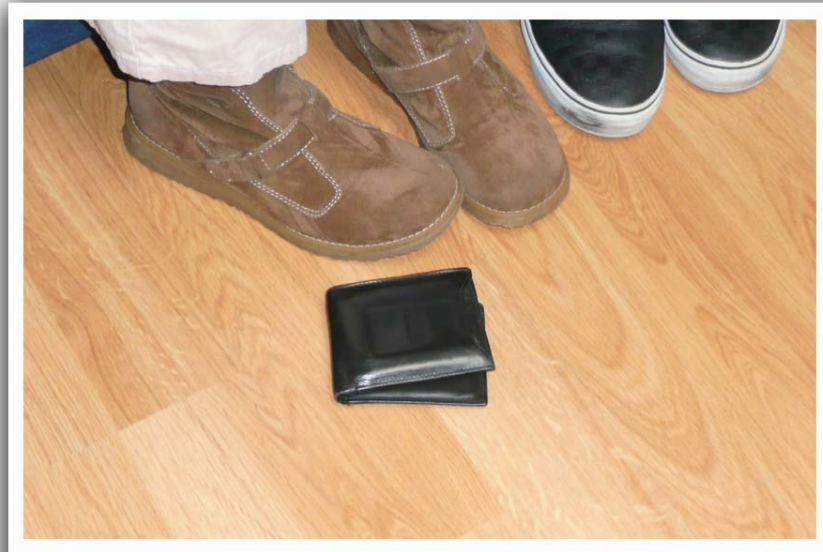
“Even if we are convinced that the first appearance of life in the universe is best explained as the result of a ‘First Cause’ Creator God from outside the natural realm, this still leaves us several options as to the NATURE of this God. Is this God personal? Isn’t it possible that the God who formed matter from non-matter and life from non-life may simply be some kind of impersonal force? After all, many world religions would suggest that this is the case.”



“I believe that this creator God is a personal God based on His ability to DECIDE. Let me explain. Let’s return to our wallet for a second. What happens if I simply let go of the wallet? What forces are felt by the wallet? When I let go of this wallet, it immediately drops to the ground. Why does that happen? Why doesn’t it just float here for a minute and then drop to the ground when gravity DECIDES to act on it? Why don’t we EVER see that happen? You and I already know the answer! Gravity does not DECIDE to act at all! Gravity is an IMPERSONAL force, and it has been our experience that the EFFECT of an impersonal force is felt the minute that the force enters into the environment.”



“If we were floating around in a zero gravity environment (an imaginary room, for example) and we then inserted the force of gravity into this room, we would all immediately be pulled to the floor. The effect of the gravity is felt the minute gravity enters the room. That’s the way impersonal forces work. They can’t DECIDE whether or not they will activate their effect. Their impact is felt immediately; the minute the force enters the room. Gravity doesn’t enter the room and say, “Not yet, not yet, not yet... OK, now!” Gravity cannot DECIDE when its effect will be felt. It cannot DECIDE when it will act.”



“See, the ability to DECIDE whether to act is a characteristic of ‘personhood’. The ability to move and act FREELY as a result of a conscious independent decision is a characteristic of free agency. It is a characteristic common to PERSONS, not impersonal forces. Does that make sense?”

“OK, so what does that tell you about the force that created the universe? Well, if it’s an impersonal force, then it can only be as old as the universe. In other words, the minute the impersonal force existed, its creative power was felt, and ‘bingo’ all space, time and matter also began. Remember our gravity example. The minute gravity appears, you feel its power. In a similar way, the minute an impersonal creative force appears, we would then observe its power in the creation of the universe. This means that the impersonal force would only be as old as the universe that was created as a result of its existence.”



“But wait a minute; if that is true, we have a dilemma! If the creative cause of the universe is only as old as the universe itself, then we must ask the obvious question, ‘Hey what caused THAT force to exist?’ Whatever caused the cause of the universe; THIS would then be the more powerful cause we would want to identify! Do you see the problem here? A true and singular first cause must be eternal by definition. In a very real sense, we innately know that whatever caused this ‘caused universe’ must be some kind of eternal first cause with the ability to DECIDE. Whatever caused this universe, it did so as a DECISION, and this ability to decide gives away the fact that the first cause of the universe is, in fact, a PERSONAL force.”

“I believe that PERSONAL THEISM is true because the first, uncaused cause of the universe was able to DECIDE as a personal agent.”

Step Three: What Kind of Faith System is Most Reasonable?

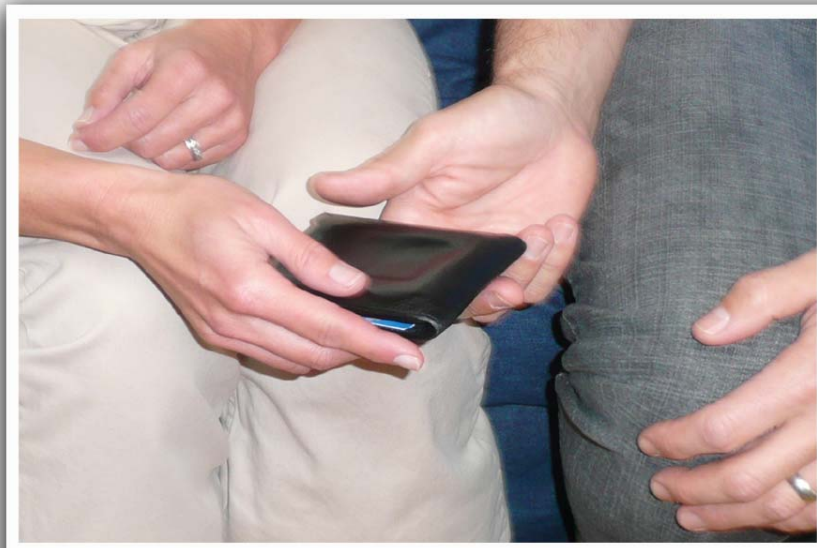
“If there is a God who is all-powerful and personal, it certainly makes sense that He might be concerned for the welfare of His personal creations. If he doesn’t care about us, why would he create us in the first place? If he had the choice NOT to create us (He could have decided otherwise), the fact that He chose to create us should give us good reason to think that He actually cares about us. Even the atheist has to explain WHY there is something here when there could easily be nothing here! It is reasonable to infer that a God who creates (when He doesn’t have to) would care about the condition of what He has created. A God like this would want to guide His creation toward true moral ‘goodness’, the kind of ‘goodness’ that would reflect His own character. After all, a being with this kind of incredible power (the power to decide to create the entire universe) would also have the power to eliminate imperfection, including moral imperfection. A God like this would be a PERFECT being.”

“It makes sense that a personal creator God would want his personal creations to understand and strive for the very values that are a reflection of his nature. It’s reasonable to assume that a personal God might present us with guidelines for living and then encourage us to live by these guidelines. And this is where we need to take some time to think about the nature of God. Let’s think about how God might reasonably expect us to live a truly moral life. Our human instinct is to create RULES that we can follow so that we can measure our success and judge how close we are to being ‘Godly’, but does a system of rules actually create a Godly person?”

“Now, you may have noticed that my wallet is still sitting on the ground. Imagine that I have a really bad back and I’m unable to bend over to pick up the wallet. I might ask you to pick it up for me, and if you did, this generous action on your part might be viewed as a morally good act. I might then find myself wanting to reward you by giving you the dollar that started this whole conversation.”



“But what if you knew in advance that I would give you the dollar as a reward if you would help me pick up the wallet? What if you ONLY picked up the wallet because you wanted that dollar? Would your actions still be seen as morally good, or would your greedy motive ruin the nature of the action? If you and I are only ‘being good’ so that we can EARN a prize, are we being truly ‘good’? If all my good actions were driven by my desire to get something in return, would we still call my actions ‘good’?”



“It seems to me that rules-based and works-based religious systems don’t actually produce ‘good’ people. They instead produce people who LOOK good. True goodness is a heart condition. It’s a reflection of who we are when no one is looking. It’s a reflection of our desire to do what’s right, even when there is nothing in it for us. It’s one thing to experience joy or satisfaction for doing what you know you ought to do; it’s another thing to do something ONLY because you are hoping to gain a prize. If we are only ‘performing’ because we are hoping to get the reward of ‘Salvation’, we’re merely trying to serve ourselves by earning a prize. On the other hand, if our hearts are so changed that we desire to behave morally even when the carrot of Salvation is not dangling in front of us, then we can say that we truly are ‘good’ people.”



“If you are looking for a spiritual worldview in which truly good people are even possible, you are going to have to look for one that does not REQUIRE good works. Now what religious worldview teaches that Salvation is NOT the result of anything that you can do, but is instead the result of something that has already been done for you by God Himself? There is only one; it is called Christianity. The Christian worldview teaches that Jesus came to pay the price for every ‘less than perfect’ thing you ever did; every sin and crime you’ve ever committed. God doesn’t judge us based on any good deed we might do, because our good deeds aren’t all that impressive if you really think about it. Instead, God accepts us on the basis of who JESUS is and the price that he paid for us if we will only believe in Him and trust HIM instead of ourselves. Good works are not REQUIRED for Salvation, even though they are typically the RESULT of our transformation. True moral goodness comes when we live and love in response to what has already been done for us, and not because we are hoping to win a prize.”

“I believe that CHRISTIAN THEISM is true because it best accounts for God’s desire to enable and encourage true moral behavior”

Conclusion: There Are Lot’s of Good Reasons

“So, I think there are some really good reasons to believe what I believe about God and the nature of His message to us. I am a Christian because:

(1) I believe that THEISM (the belief in an all-powerful first cause that is NOT part of the natural caused universe) best accounts for the appearance of our universe, and...

(2) I believe that PERSONAL THEISM best accounts for the nature of this ‘first cause’ and the fact that this cause had the ability to DECIDE to begin the universe, and...

(3) I believe that CHRISTIAN THEISM best accounts for the possibility of true moral goodness (something that a Personal God would desire for his creation)

In the end, the Christian Worldview best accounts for the reality we see in our universe and in our lives as moral beings. Could more be said about Christianity? Of course! We’ve only just begun! But in three short steps I hope I have at least placed Christianity in a position of rational consideration. I hope that I have at least given you some reason to stop and think twice about the truth of the Christian worldview...”

